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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: MFA ON SCO CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. MOSCOW 220

[B](#). MOSCOW 240

[C](#). SECSTATE 8443

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#). (C) Summary. The MFA official in charge of organizing the Russian-hosted March 25-27 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Conference on Afghanistan told us on February 3 that the GOR would welcome U.S., G8, NATO, and EU participation. The conference will focus on combating narco-trafficking, terrorism, and organized crime in Afghanistan, but will not discuss military issues. FM Lavrov will represent Russia, and the GOR is hoping for ministerial-level attendance from all SCO members and observers. The goal of the conference, according to the official, is to find common approaches to resolving the challenges in Afghanistan and not to place blame. The MFA indicated Iran had expressed its intention to attend, and said the GOR would do what it could to ensure Iran's "constructive participation." The official denied any GOR role in pressuring the Kyrgyz government to close Manas, but reiterated DFM Karasin's comments that the U.S. and Russia should have a dialogue about coordinating military assets in the region to support operations in Afghanistan (ref B). End Summary.

[2](#). (C) In a February 3 conversation with Poloff, MFA SCO Counselor Igor Arazhaev indicated that based on the framework and agenda agreed to by the SCO members and Afghanistan at a January 14 Moscow meeting chaired by Deputy Foreign Minister Borodavkin, Russian diplomatic missions were in the process of informing select host governments and international organizations, including the U.S., G8 members, Turkey, NATO, the EU, and the UN, of the details of the planned March 25-27 SCO conference on Afghanistan that the GOR would host (Ref A). The GOR would welcome our feedback on the conference, and has said it would like to invite the U.S. to attend should we express an interest to do so.

[3](#). (SBU) According to Arazhaev, the conference will last two and a half days, with two plenary sessions scheduled. Finding common approaches to combat narco-trafficking, terrorism, and organized crime in Afghanistan would be the main theme. Russia, as the current SCO chair and host of the conference, will be represented by FM Lavrov, and is aiming for ministerial level participation by all SCO members and observers. The GOR would welcome the Secretary's participation, but understands that may not be possible. The GOR would like conference participants to adopt a consensus declaration, as well as set up a mechanism for follow up on

conference goals.

¶4. (C) Repeating comments made to us by other MFA officials (Ref A), Arazhaev assured Poloff that the conference would focus on constructive efforts to resolve the challenges in Afghanistan, particularly those with cross-border spillover effects. The GOR was not interested in criticisms or confrontations about past actions, only on finding common approaches to the way forward. In this regard, Arazhaev, in response to Poloff's questions about Iranian participation in the conference, indicated that Moscow would do what it could to make sure the Iranians "played a constructive role."

¶5. (C) Responding to Poloff's concern about reported Russian pressure on the Kyrgyz government to close Manas Air Base, Arazhaev denied a Russian role. He stated that Manas was not so unacceptable to the GOR that Moscow would exert pressure on Bishkek. Returning to the subject of the SCO conference, he indicated that bases and military issues would not be part of the conference discussion. However, echoing Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin's response last week to the Ambassador's demarche (Refs B and C), he said that the U.S. and Russia should in the near future have a dialogue about coordinating U.S. military presence in Central Asia and Russian facilities and capacities in the region to support operations in Afghanistan.

BEYRLE